



News Release

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Private septic systems are key to preventing pollution and illness

OLYMPIA — There are nearly a million septic systems across the state, all of which protect Washington residents from illness and keep the environment clean.

Governor Jay Inslee has declared Sept. 21-25 [SepticSmart Week](#), underscoring the importance of maintaining the 950,000 privately owned septic systems operating in Washington.

Pollution from malfunctioning septic systems is a serious issue and has contaminated groundwater, forced costly closures of shellfish growing areas, and made people who ate contaminated shellfish sick.

Owners of septic systems are responsible for ensuring proper functioning and safety of their systems—including ensuring appropriate use, routine inspections by certified professionals, getting needed repairs done quickly, and always having secure lids on tanks and other components. The consequences of unsecured lids can be extreme. One child drowned earlier this year and another was injured in separate incidents involving improperly secured septic system lids. It's important that septic system owners remember to inspect their systems and make necessary repairs to prevent a tragedy.

“In addition to effective sewage treatment, it is crucial there are no safety problems with septic systems,” said Jerrod Davis, director of the Office of Environmental Health and Safety.

“Property owners and industry professionals must be vigilant to ensure they’re not only working properly, but are always safe and secure.”

Routine inspections and pumping of a system can catch problems before they get serious and can prolong the life of your system. Most county health agencies have lists of certified septic

maintenance providers and septic pumpers. They can also provide help to homeowners who are having trouble finding the opening to their septic tanks.

However, there are a few easy tips to help maintain and protect systems. Always keep the tank area and the drainfield accessible. Don't build any structure on top of these areas so inspections and repairs are possible. Spot problems by checking around the tank, the drainfield, and down slope areas for odor, wet spots, or other above-ground signs of trouble. If any of these problems are found, arrange for repairs quickly and keep people away from the area.

Learn the [basics of septic system maintenance](#) and get tips for homeowners on the Department of Health website. Learn more about being Septic Smart from the [Environmental Protection Agency's webpage](#).

Septic system safety and pollution prevention are shared responsibilities beginning with property owners. Effective sewage treatment is a public health cornerstone and important to our environment.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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